

BLUE BARRON And His 1938-41

Would you believe that this is the first 12" LP devoted to BLUE BARRON and his Music Of Yesterday And Today?

With the notable exception of a few, the sweet orchestras of the big name band period haven't weathered time as well as the swing or jazz bands of the same era. Some of this is understandable. And yet, the sweet orchestras were just as much a part of the period and their music equally important to the name band era.

Before the introduction of jazz and later swing, popular music was primarily dance music. America became a dancing nation before World War I and the dance music of ragtime, the two-step, turkey trot, Military one-step, etc., were played mostly by five or six piece groups. These combos evolved during the 1920s into orchestras of 10 or more pieces. By the early '30s, the dance band was becoming standardized with three or four reeds, four or five brass and four rhythm providing music ideally suited for it's main purpose--dancing. The swing band grew out of the dance orchestra.

Blue was no pioneer in the dance band field. He didn't greatly depart from the norms. He didn't crusade for his music or a musical cause. He took the sweet style already established, embellished and refined it and his resultant popularity stemmed from dancers who appreciated the style and sound he gave it. It was dance music well played and, on disc, well recorded.

There are stories and legends about Blue Barron-most of which aren't true. For instance, he never played in Sammy Kaye's band. He was not a jazzer or a swinger gone wrong who gave up "the art" for commercial gain. Here is the real Blue Barron story.

Blue played violin in a campus band as an undergraduate at Ohio University but upon graduation, he returned to his native Cleveland and set up an orchestra booking agency. He became the manager and partner of Sammy Kaye. The partnership endured several years until Blue decided to organize his own band and then, in 1936, formed what was billed as "The Blue Barron Orchestra directed by Red Atkins." Red had been Blue's roommate in college. Barron's band was recruited from Cleveland musicians but their first engagement was a two-weeker in Troy, N.Y. The band broke in on the road and, after a long Rochester, N.Y. hotel stand, returned to Cleveland, going into the Southern Tavern where they got their first network or coastto-coast radio remote wire on NBC.

From the start, Blue had selected the sweet style being played by Lombardo. Kyser had devised the singing song title but Barron refined it to include, in the introduction, four bars or so of the melody and lyrics of another well known standard or song hit which segued into the new song title. Russ Carlyle sang all the introductions no matter who was to sign the chorus later. Another inovation was the use of the Barron theme melody, SOMETIMES I'M HAPPY, under-neath his spoken announcement of the vocalist. The double singing song titles and the sliding steel guitar theme treatment were clever twists and certainly added to the initial popularity of the orchestra.

The broadcasts from the Southern Tavern paid off in the spring of 1937 and Barron, who was by this time fronting the band--Atkins having left after the Rochester engagement, was signed for his first recording session. The band travelled to New York and cut four sides at Brunswick studios on May 26, 1937, ostensibly for the Mills Music Company labels, Variety and Master. Two sides were issued on Variety but Mills and the American Record Company, who pressed and distributed the Mills records, agreed to abandon the labels and the final two selections were issued on ARC's Vocalion label. Nothing startling resulted from these releases and the band was back at their Cleveland location broadcasting three times a week. Their prime slot was a Saturday night broadcast on NBC and that December Blue received a call from Mrs. Maria Kramer who booked the orchestras for her family's two New York hotels, the Lincoln with it's Blue Room and the Edison with the Green Room. She asked Barron to come to New York to discuss bringing his orchestra into the Edison Hotel. The deal was quickly set and the band opened in the Green Room on January 5, 1938. Mrs. Kramer laughingly remembered that after the contracts with Blue had been signed, he had to borrow train fare back to Cleveland.

OTHER HINDSIGHT RELEASES:

HSR-101 JIMMY DORSEY, 1939-40. Vocals: Helen O'Connell, Bob Eberly

- HSR-102 HARRY JAMES, 1943-46. Vocals: Helen Forrest
- HSR-103 LES BROWN, 1944-46. Vocals: Doris Day HSR-104 GLEN GRAY & CASA LOMA, 1939-40. Vocals: Kenny Sargent,
- Pee Wee Hunt
- HSR-105 CHARLIE SPIVAK, 1943-46. Vocals: Irene Daye HSR-106 GEORGE BARNES OCTET, 1946.
- HSR-107 OZZIE NELSON, 1940-42. Vocals: Ozzie Nelson, Harriet Hilliard
- HSR-108 CLAUDE THORNHILL, 1947. Vocals: Fran Warren, Gene Williams
- HSR-109 LARRY CLINTON, 1937-38. Vocals: Bea Wain HSR-110 BLUE BARRON, 1941. Vocals: Russ Carlyle, Charlie Fisher,
- **3 Blue Notes**

HSR-111 DICK JURGENS, 1937-39. Vocals: Eddy Howard, Ronnie Kemper HSR-112 CARMEN CAVALLARO, 1946.

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By this time, the orchestra's billing had changed to "The Music of Yesterday and Today Styled the Blue Barron Way" and in less than a month of their opening at the Edison Hotel in New York, they cut their first session for RCA's Bluebird label. The fame of the band truly became national through their nightly broadcasts on NBC's Red and Blue networks, as well as on the CBS and Mutual networks. Until interrupted by World War II, the band worked a pattern of 26 weeks a year of hotel engagements and the other 26 weeks were theatres and one-nighters. As to the theatres, most bands had to build up to an appearance at the prestigious New York Paramount; not Blue Barron. It was the orchestra's first theatre date.

There was one cloud, however, and who are familiar with Barron's recording output will recognize it. From February 3, 1938, through December 18, 1940, the band was the work-horse band of the RCA Bluebird label. They recorded many great new songs (94 on Bluebird) but through no fault of Barron, the song assignments became poorer and poorer as 1940 ran on. Instead of the quality new songs by recognized composers, movie and Broadway show tunes, the songs the band was assigned became more and more marginal until finally Blue and his orchestra decided to sit out the remaining year of their recording contract.

Blue subsequently, signed with Elite Records but before 1942 was very old, Barron was called into the service. Blue left the band in the control of his sister and hired Tommy Ryan, a vocalist, to front the band. Interestingly, he had been on the verge of signing Perry Como to lead the Barron crew as Como had left the Ted Weems band and was in New York looking for a job. Andy Russell had been doing the Chesterfield Cigarette radio show but was having contract problems with them and at the last minute, Perry was signed to replace Russell

Barron didn't go into an army service band as did many but instead volunteered for the Airborne Infantry. Unfortunately Blue, as a paratrooper, made one too many jumps and was hurt seriously enough to keep him earthbound thereafter for the duration. After the war, Blue and the band had left Eli Oberstein's Elite Records and were deciding whether to sign with Columbia Records, where producer Mitchell Ayres wanted them, or to go with Frank Walker, former head of RCA Records, who was putting together a new record company for MGM. Blue opted for MGM, taking in with him a tune he'd picked up several years earlier: a British song he felt would be a great hit. It was CRUISING DOWN THE RIVER and it became Barron's all-time best seller. Incidentally, Blue's friend and fellow leader, Russ Morgan, thereafter recorded the cover version for Decca Records of CRUISING DOWN THE RIVER, using practically the same arrangement as Blue's and because the new MGM firm was having production and distribution problems on the West Coast, Russ walked off with a big share of the sales. However, Blue's version still became a million seller. Blue is quick to tell you that this didn't affect their friendship in the least. One thing you quickly discover with Blue is his lightheartedness and his extreme concern over the possibility of hurting anyone's feelings. George T. Simon, in his book "The Big Bands" (MacMillan Company, 1967) described Blue Barron as "an effervescent man who had what some of the other mickey mouse leaders didn't have: a sense of humor about himself and his music. He didn't take either too seriously nor did he try doggedly to defend his music....'

The Blue Barron orchestra was a happy one. From 1937 until the draft calls of 1941, there were only three changes in personnel. This is pretty unique in view of the constant turnover in the other bands, sweet or swing.

On our album, you'll discover that not all the selections have the double singing song titles or the spoken vocalist announcement by Blue. There's an explanation. Back in 1941, ASCAP--the performing rights organization, doubled their annual licensing fees to radio stations, both network and independent. The stations refused to pay the new fees and as of midnight, December 31, 1940, no more ASCAP songs could be aired in the U.S. Glenn Miller discovered that he could not broadcast his theme song MOONLIGHT SERENADE nor

Probable 1938-39 Personnel:

- Trumpets: Bill Burkhardt, Ernie Straub or Bill Ratzenburger Trombones: Stanley Usher, Charlie
- Fisher Saxophones: Lamar Shewell, Bill
- Hammond, Myron Selker or Alan Holmes; 4th Sax, Frank May, added September, 1939
- Plano: Carl Ladra, or Donald Tiff Guitar: Ronnie Snyder (doubling
- whistling)

Tuba: Walter Major Drums: Bill Zaremba or Hack O'Brien

Probable 1941 Personnel: Same as 1938-39, except: Bill Ratzenburger replaces Milt Hubbard on trumpet; Ivan Lane replaces Carl Ladra on piano; Clark Shelton replaces Frank May on saxophone; Jimmy Brown replaces either Lamar Shewell or Bill Hammond on alto sax. could Charlie Barnet use his theme CHEROKEE. Quickly, they had substitute themes written, SLUMBER SONG and REDSKIN RHUMBA respectively. Blue was caught in the same bind and SOMETIMES I'M HAPPY, an ASCAP song, gave way to an Ivan Lane paraphrased theme YESTERDAY AND TODAY which is included herein as the only recording of it known to exist. But the ASCAP ban affected more than just Blue's themesong. As the double singing song titles used older songs which were all ASCAP, they couldn't be broadcast and the gimmick had to be dropped, at least for the time being. Also as the theme was reprised under each vocalist introduction by Blue, that was necessarily eliminated for the duration of the ASCAP ban. It wasn't until the latter part of 1941 that the radio and ASCAP people got together and all music was again broadcastable.

Our program here is drawn from electrical transcriptions that were made exclusively for radio-station-use-only at the time and has never been on record before. The songs are the usual mix of the period: movie songs, standards and Tin Pan Alley. Most of these selections were arranged by Carl Ladra or Ivan Lane. A few of the selections were arranged by Ralph Flanagan or Larry Fotine, both of whom went on to lead their own successful orchestras.

Russ Carlyle was the featured vocalist of the Barron band from it's inception to 1942 and his induction into the military service. Like Blue, he was a Clevelander joining the band when he was only 16. Today he is leading his own band in Las Vegas, the mid-west and occasionally appearing at Roseland in New York.

Charlie Fisher divided his time between singing and playing second trombone. Jimmy Brown also doubled on vocals and played alto in the sax section. Jimmy was not one of the original band members, having joined Barron in early 1941. The Three Blue Notes vocal trio was made up of Russ Carlyle, Charlie Fisher and Ronnie Snyder.

So it's now dance time. Play the music and dance--better not let anyone catch you just listening.

Brad McCuen

Mr. McCuen is a 30 + year veteran of the record industry, originator of RCA Victor's Vintage series, & presently heads SESAC's Nashville operations.

Side One, 1938-39:

1.	SOMETIMES I'M HAPPYTheme (with spoken intro)Youmans-Caesar-GreyWarner Bros.	0:54
2.	LOVE IS WHERE YOU FIND IT Vocal: Charlie Fisher Warren-Mercer-Dubin Warner Bros.	2:25
3.	HEART AND SOUL Vocal: Russ Carlyle Carmicheal-Loesser Famous	2:40
4.	THAT'S RIGHT, I'M WRONG Vocal: Charlie Fisher Carmichael-Adams Famous	2:24
5.	AT LONG LAST LOVE Vocal: Russ Carlyle Porter Chappell	2:31
6.	YOU'RE THE ONLY STAR IN MY BLUE HEAVEN Vocal: Russ Carlyle & Glee Club Autry Shapiro-Bernstein	2:42
7.	DON'T CROSS YOUR FINGERS (Cross Your Heart) Vocal: Charlie Fisher Donahue-Marks-Shay Warner Bros.	2:10
8.	GARDEN IN THE RAINVocal: Russ CarlyleGibbons-DyrenforthCampbell, Connelly	2:36
9.	BLUEBIRDS IN THE MOONLIGHT Vocal: Charlie Fisher Robin-Rainger Famous	2:45
Sid	e Two, 1941: Typed Of Charles AS	CAP.
1.	IDA, SWEET AS APPLE CIDER Vocal: Three Blue Notes Leonard PD	2:12
2.	I GUESS I'LL HAVE TO DREAM THE REST Vocal: Jimmy Brown Stoner-Block-Green BMI	4:02
3.	DO YOU CARE Vocal: Jimmy Brown Elliot-Quadling Cherio BMI	3:34
4.	BLUES MY NAUGHTY SWEETIE GIVES TO ME Vocal: Three Blue Notes/Swanstone-McCarron-Morgan/ <i>E.B. Marks</i> /B	2:07 MI
5.	THE THINGS I LOVE Vocal: Russ Carlyle & Glee Club Barlow-Harris Cherio BMI	3:31
6.	FANCY MEETING YOU Vocal: Charlie Fisher Arlen-Harburg Warner Bros. ASCAP	2:18
7.	MARIA ELENA Vocal: Russ Carlyle & Glee Club Barcelata Peer, Int'l BMI	3:24
8.	YOU ARE MY SUNSHINE Vocal: Three Blue Notes Davis-Mitchell Peer, Int'l	2:14
9.	YESTERDAY AND TODAY (Theme in 1941)	1:15

Produced By: Wally Heider

Editing: Tom Shallcross Mastering: Steve Guy, Location Recorders, Burbank Printing, Fabrication and Virgin Vinyl

Arrangers: Carl Ladra, Ivan Lane

Pressings: KM Records, Burbank KM Records Coordinator: Jim Auchterlonie

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write to: Hindsight Records, Inc.

P.O. Box 7114-R Burbank, CA 91510



